

LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

# A GLOBAL FUND FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

Views from Selected Low-income Countries

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The voices of low-income countries (LICs) in the social protection discourse are not yet being listened to, and more must be done to increase their participation throughout the Global Fund for Social Protection (GFSP) programme cycle.



Conceptual clarity and policy coherence by the social protection fraternity are crucial for the sector to be strategic and to communicate a consistent message to all stakeholders.



To commit to initiatives like the Global Fund for Social Protection while avoiding further indebtedness LICs need guarantees for long-term financing of social protection.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study on low-income countries' (LICs) views of the proposed Global Fund for Social Protection (GFSP) sought to contribute to discussions on the operational dimensions of the fund, adding to existing knowledge on the available financial and administrative options. Findings from this study point us to several broad areas of interest, including the political economy, systems and structures, technical and financial capacity to implement, and accountability.

## **Cautious optimism for the future of social protection:**

The picture which emerges from the study is one of cautious optimism for the future of social protection (SP), and specifically of the GFSP. There is enthusiasm that SP is on the cusp of being incorporated into the mainstream development agenda at national, regional and global levels. But there is also concern that assembling the required financial resources and securing elite buy-in could still stand in the way of progress.

## **Conceptual clarity and policy coherence are needed:**

Issues of conceptual vagueness and policy incoherence persist in the SP discourse, presenting a significant challenge to progress. Over time, there have been changes regarding what components to include in the concept, partly due to the scope of the issue being widened to include preventive, protective, promotive, and transformative aspects. However, this lack of conceptual clarity may also be symptomatic of the failure of proponents of the SP approach and of duty-bearers to put in place an empirical framework to categorise the key elements, features and experiences implied in the SP concept, and to use this to demonstrate accountability to citizens. The downside of this is that citizens are unable to call for availability of and/or access to social protection.

Against this background, all stakeholders in this discourse ought to be able to define and describe SP in such a way that everyone understands it, across the board. Similarly, fragmented, uncoordinated anti-poverty policy and the absence of a holistic and strategic approach to dealing with vulnerability leads to duplication and other inefficiencies. Key stakeholders, including policymakers, implementors, academia, civil society organisations (CSOs) and communication professionals could come together in a structured discussion to help clarify and simplify the SP concept and propose the best ways of communicating this to different audiences. At the global level, this discussion could be organised

under the auspices of one of the existing SP networks or alliances, such as the [Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors](#) (GCSPF), [Global Alliances for Social Protection](#) or the [Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection](#) (USP2030). On the other hand, the existing multi-stakeholder SP platforms could play a similar role at national level.

## **LICs' governments and their citizens strongly support**

**SP:** Despite the resulting absence of concise discussion and debate, LIC governments and their citizens attach significant importance to SP and to the establishment of a global facility to inspire and drive progress in this area, albeit with some concerns.<sup>1</sup> At the national level these concerns, predominantly among officials in LIC governments, pertain to the persistent and, more recently, growing levels of poverty and vulnerability in their countries. The poverty impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are also a reminder of how risk can suddenly translate into a crisis of immeasurable proportions. Paradoxically, budget allocations for SP do not yet correspond with the verbal commitments witnessed on the side of policy prescription. For some governments this reflects more of a failure to utilise all possible financial resources and explore options for expanding fiscal space than disinterest or low prioritisation of SP. Hence, even where there are still considerable constraints on fiscal space, investments in SP by many LICs have been on the rise, and any efforts that are perceived to be supporting these investments are bound to meet with a lot of interest.

**There is evidence of some concerns:** That said, there are still concerns about how a possible future GFSP might work. For example, some officials are reluctant to support any idea which may increase their country's debt commitments. In the absence of guarantees of adequacy and sustainability of financing, chances are that only a few LICs would risk going ahead with the idea. Unsurprisingly, this view is more evident in those countries which are currently experiencing a debt crisis. Related to this reluctance is another challenge-conditionality. The main fear here is that conditionality could lead to deprioritising other sectors LICs are interested in and committed to.

<sup>1</sup> Note that »government« is not monolithic and there may still be voices in government which do not support the prioritisation of social protection, especially when it comes to the allocation of budgets.

**Politics is an important factor in SP:** Politics plays a key role in shaping the direction SP will take. In most countries the presidency is usually the main driver of policy prioritisation and budget allocations. Similarly, parliaments are becoming increasingly involved in policymaking and resource allocation for the sector. On the idea of one of the countries taking the lead when it comes to making a case for SP, the enthusiasm is clear. In Eastern and Central Africa, Zambia and Kenya have shown early interest.<sup>2</sup> A possible approach would be to clarify goals, strategy, and outcomes, and then work with a small group of five to seven countries, using a safe space to explore these and other issues relating to the fund.

**LICs are conspicuously absent from the discussion table:** It is notable that LICs are currently absent from discussions about a potential future path of SP, hence the urgency, however belated, of establishing a mechanism for their inclusion. This could be achieved by first creating a representative group of LICs and a safe space for them to agree goals, issues, and strategies. Ideally, there would be broad participation in such group, for example including CSOs, representatives from academia and relevant private sector players. The participating entities, from the aforementioned five to seven countries, should be supported in organising themselves in the safe space.

**Building on LICs' positive achievements:** LICs have, in the last few years, made some progress on the SP front, despite the financial, technical, and other constraints they have continued to face. Their achievements are evident in the policies, strategies, and operational mechanisms they have put in place. Likewise, more resources are also being devoted to the SP sector, both for direct transfers to beneficiaries and for other related expenditure (such as the generation of evidence, research and structured dialogue within and among key stakeholder groups). It is important to build on these achievements. In light of this, the more developed countries should first acknowledge what has already been achieved and then seek to understand how best to complement those achievements in ways that help to fill gaps and add value to what is being implemented.

**Long-term commitment to and predictability of SP financing is crucial:** Ensuring long-term commitment of the global community and all duty-bearers to the financing and provision of holistic SP must be a key goal if the global fund is to succeed. Similarly, to allay any fears of a future GFSP abandoning participating countries mid-cycle, LICs need guarantees regarding an acceptable financing cycle (10–15 years were suggested) and financing mechanisms, and how these may be connected, if at all, to countries' debt portfolios. Low-income countries (LICs) believe that an economically efficient and robust SP financing system would help build the confidence of different stakeholders in the programme, thus attracting more responsible investment in the

sector and encouraging cross-linkages between SP and other sectors. This, in turn, would contribute to value addition and further risk mitigation.

**Investment is urgently needed for research, building a solid evidence base, and communicating key SP messages:** Generating, collating and synthesising evidence along with the development of a solid SP research base for LICs ought to be prioritised in the early stages of any emerging programme. This information is needed to create awareness and help change any negative perceptions about SP, especially among elite and finance ministry officials.

**Groups that help drive the SP agenda:** Direct engagement with parliamentary, NGO and other groups that work on SP issues should also be promoted.<sup>3</sup> In countries where such groups or coalitions exist, for example in Uganda, Zambia and Kenya, they have successfully raised the profile of SP, increased its political significance, and advocated for increased budget allocation to the sector. They also have the potential to facilitate the integration of SP in other key development sectors.

**Creating more citizen awareness (and thus demand) and communicating the key SP messages to relevant audiences:** Creating greater and better awareness among citizens about existing SP opportunities in the respective countries and about citizens' entitlement to SP is essential for effective SP uptake. This enables citizens to apply political pressure to demand SP provision. The notion of SP as a right could also be introduced here, though caution should be exercised as it may not be realistic to push hard on the issue of SP as a right if the ability of duty-bearers (governments) to provide is seriously constrained in the first place, and neither the systems nor the resources for this exist. Capacity-building organisations could play a key role here.

**Considering »rebranding« SP:** Consideration should be given to »rebranding SP«, to give it a renewed sense of purpose – communicating both the urgency of addressing the issue and the shared interest with most other development sectors. The goal of eradicating extreme and chronic poverty through SP could, for example, help to galvanise interest and build cohesion/solidity, while at the same time raising the SP profile. Since LICs tend to prioritise sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and nutrition, these could be the entry points for experimenting with this innovation. Where they exist, CSO platforms on SP could take the lead on addressing this issue.

**Investing in sharing knowledge, experience, and approaches to accountability, within and among interested countries:** Although LICs are becoming more involved in the ongoing conversation regarding GFSP, consideration should be given to the establishment of mecha-

<sup>2</sup> For a fair conclusion to be made regarding such leadership, more countries would have to be asked about their interest and willingness to provide leadership.

<sup>3</sup> The Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection (PFSP) in Uganda and the African Parliamentary Union at the Africa-wide level are examples of these.

nisms for sharing knowledge and experience in the design, delivery, and evaluation of SP programmes, as well as in approaches to accountability. Civil society organisations that have direct links with citizens, especially those who are current or potential beneficiaries of SP provision, should be able to play an important role here.

**Reaching a prior joint agreement on how decisions will be made:** In view of how complex shared decision-making in GFSP is likely to be, consensus will be needed with all potential collaborating partners in GFSP on how decisions will be made, the roles different stakeholders will play and how mutual accountability will be ensured. Besides

using the standard approach of multistakeholder policy and operations management teams, periodic reviews and dialogues on strategic and operational matters could also be trialled.

**Focusing particularly on more vulnerable informal sector workers:** COVID-19 and its negative effects have revealed, or even accentuated, disproportionate economic impacts on categories of people who are already marginalised, including women and people with disabilities. Organisations that work with such groups ought to heighten their efforts to ensure that the interests of the groups they represent are prioritised on the SP and livelihood agenda.

## 1

# INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND APPROACH

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The following report is the result of a study<sup>4</sup> undertaken during the period from November 2021 to January 2022, on low-income countries' (LICs) view of the proposed Global Fund for Social Protection (GFSP). In June 2012, governments, employers and workers adopted the *ILO recommendation concerning national floors of social protection*.<sup>5</sup> All UN bodies were asked to consider: (a) building and/or strengthening national social protection floor (SPF) teams; (b) supporting national dialogues on potential options for designing and implementing locally appropriate SPFs; (c) assisting countries to undertake analysis of SP needs and gaps; (d) promoting SPFs as instruments to advance inclusive and sustainable development; and (e) working with relevant national authorities to strengthen the collection of the data needed to analyse SP needs and existing provisions.

To augment national efforts in low-income countries to reduce poverty, insecurity and inequality through SPFs, a dedicated financing facility is being proposed. This, it is hoped, would enable the global community to support national efforts in the low-income countries to introduce and/or strengthen national SPFs. However, the voices of LICs in this process are conspicuous by their absence.

## 1.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to contribute to discussions on the operational dimensions of the GFSP, add to the global knowledge base on the financial and administrative options for the GFSP and help to develop concrete proposals on different critical aspects for the implementation of the fund. The outcomes of the study, alongside those from other related studies, will directly feed into the development of policy recommendations by the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) and will help shape the design elements of the GFSP proposal, while at the same time advising on next steps in advocacy work. Priorities for

the study include issues of coordination, financing, donors' and low-income countries' views of the proposed GCSPF.

The primary objective of the study is to give LICs more of a voice in the debate on the establishment of the GFSP, by accessing better and more recent evidence of LIC views, in light of the fact that these may differ from those of middle-income countries. Specifically, the study seeks to establish the extent to which LIC governments prioritise publicly funded SP and how this reflects the priorities of their populations; whether funding is predictable and long term; the concerns that governments have regarding autonomy; interest in technical cooperation on SP strategies; etc.

## 1.3 METHODOLOGY

Based on the first step in the study, a review of relevant literature, as well as an examination of a set of guiding questions and our existing knowledge about the SP landscape we created five broad categories of respondents for the study: civil society, bilateral donors and agencies, government representatives, academia, and multilateral agencies. Interviews were carried out with a cross section of respondents from Uganda, Kenya, and Zambia. In total, 19 interviews were carried out using a semi-structured interview guide to gather the required information. Using the author's experience and contacts, the study did a deep dive into Uganda, reviewing policies and programmes and analysing practices.

## 1.4 BACKGROUND TO SP IN EAST AFRICA

In the past few years, the SP sector has registered growing interest on the part of key decision-makers in Uganda and other countries in East and Central Africa (especially Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, and Zambia). The increased importance of this »new« instrument of socio-economic change in the region signifies a fundamental paradigm shift, which began in the late 1990s with heightened interest in addressing poverty and vulnerability issues. In the case of Uganda, two of the programmes that exemplify this renewed interest in SP are the Older Persons' Cash Transfer Programme (OPCT), referred to as the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE), and the North-

<sup>4</sup> This study was commissioned by Brot für die Welt.

<sup>5</sup> Recommendation R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) (ilo.org)

ern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). The former is being implemented using a »layered« approach with new institutional arrangements having been placed on top of existing community development programmes, while the latter follows a »nested« approach with community-level distribution principles having been located within the country's administrative system. Irrespective of these different approaches, it is significant that for most countries in the region SP is gaining credibility and attracting interest, despite the slow speed of change. This reflects new confidence especially since the formerly held belief, particularly among economists, was that SP policies were generally antithetical to economic principles.



## 2

## WHAT WE LEARNT FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW

Most countries in East and Central Africa, including Uganda, have made noteworthy progress in establishing and developing SP programmes focused on poverty and vulnerability (OECD 2017; Lwanga-Ntale 2013). Participatory poverty assessments carried out in the early and mid-2010s not only informed the design of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers at the time, but also drew the attention of a growing number of policymakers to the need to focus on risk and vulnerability issues. Despite this progress, the dynamic nature of vulnerability in the region has reminded strategists about the need to implement basic SP policies to protect the poor against adverse economic and social consequences. In Uganda, over the years, the focus tended to be on a small number of conventional »vulnerable groups«, for example orphans, people living with AIDS (PLWA), people with disabilities (PwD), internal-

ly displaced persons (IDP), widows and the elderly,<sup>6</sup> which in turn led to a high level of »sectorisation«<sup>7</sup> and »projectisation«<sup>8</sup> of SP, reflected in a multiplicity of policies, strategies, programmes, and legal frameworks. Similarly, Tanzania adopted a Social Security Policy which acknowledges the existence of formal and informal social security but

- <sup>6</sup> Devereux, S. et al. (2002): Social Protection in Uganda: Study to Inform the Development of a Framework for Social Protection in the Context of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. Phase I Report: Vulnerability Assessment and Review of Initiatives, Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, October 2002.
- <sup>7</sup> The term »sectorisation« was coined by the author (2013) to refer to the tendency for SP programmes in the subregion to be vertically structured as sectors, subsectors or vulnerability categories.
- <sup>8</sup> »Projectisation« refers to the practice of establishing numerous short-term or time-bound (often donor-funded) projects.

Table 1  
Overview of SP programmes in Kenya, 2016

Scheme	Agency responsible	Target group	Number of registered beneficiary households
CT-OVC	Social Assistance Unit MEACLSP	Households with OVC	365,232
OPCT	Social Assistance Unit MEACLSP	Households with 65+	320,636
PwSD-CT	Social Assistance Unit MEACLSP	Households with people with severe disabilities (PwSD) including adults and children	41,374
HSNP	NDMA Ministry of Devolution and Planning	Poorest households in Turkana, Marsabit, Mandera and Wajir	101,630
Cash for Assets	NDMA Ministry of Devolution and Planning	Food insecure households living in poverty in arid and semi-arid lands ASAL counties	54,061
Food for Assets	NDMA Ministry of Devolution and Planning	Food insecure households living in poverty in some ASAL counties	48,962
CFA Unconditional	NDMA Ministry of Devolution and Planning	Poorest households without labour capacity in some ASAL counties	6,007

Source: Overview of social assistance programmes in Kenya, 2016. Kenya Social Protection Sector Review, 2017. Republic of Kenya. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, State Department of Social Protection.

still falls short of putting in place a holistic and strategic approach to SP<sup>9</sup>. Here, as in most other countries, »sectorisation« and »projectisation« led to the proliferation of policies, strategies, and interventions.<sup>10</sup> Kenya's experience was not very different. Despite the expansion of the National Social Protection Secretariat (SPS) in 2012 and the establishment of the State Department of Social Protection (SDSP) within the Ministry of East African Community, Labour, and Social Protection (MEACLSP) in 2015, the institutional structure of the sector is still fragmented, with both design and implementation of programmes happening across several government ministries. Table 1 shows how some of the SP programmes are scattered across different departments.

Investments in different SP instruments have been on the rise in most regions in Africa. Whether it is conditional or unconditional cash transfers, public works, feeding schemes or combinations of these, the rise in investments is in part attributable to better recognition of the contribution SP can make to poverty eradication and to wider development outcomes. However, for most countries in East Africa, the most consistent advocates for SP uptake have been actors from bilateral and multilateral organisations, supported by northern NGOs, academia, and research institutions. In Uganda in the past, most interest in SP as an instrument with poverty-reducing potential has come from the likes of DFID, the World Bank, Irish Aid, UNICEF and a range of other bilateral, multi-lateral and civil society organisations.

<sup>9</sup> See Shepherd, A. 2011. Addressing chronic poverty and vulnerability through social transfers in Tanzania: Assessing the options, Policy Brief 27. Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Manchester, UK.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Tanzania's formal social security system, which previously covered only about 5.4 per cent of the total working population, comprised the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) under the National Social Security Fund Act No. 28 of 1997; the Public Service Pension Fund (PSSP) under the Public Service Retirement Benefits Act No. 2 of 1999 (for pensionable central government employees); the Parastatal Pension Fund (PPF) under the Parastatal Pensions Act No. 14 of 1978 (covering employees in public enterprises/parastatals); the Local Authorities Provident Fund (LAPF) under the Local Authorities Provident Fund Act No. 9 of 2006 (covering local government employees); the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) under the National Health Insurance Fund Act No. 8 of 1999 (offering health insurance coverage to pensionable central government employees); and the Political Retirement Benefits Act No. 3/1999.

## 3

## STUDY FINDINGS

**3.1 HOW IS SP UNDERSTOOD AND COMMUNICATED? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Quite surprisingly, conceptualising and defining the term »social protection« emerged as the first indication that communicating the SP message itself remains an important challenge. Evidence adduced in the initial interviews suggested that a significant number of respondents, sometimes even those who work in the field, did not have a clear understanding of the term, let alone the ability to articulate it to others. Some respondents had very similar definitions, differing from others only in the angle they took. But others completely mixed up the concept. An official in a Central Government Ministry in Uganda described it as »programmes and resources that people and businesses receive when there is a crisis.« On the other hand, some members of parliament in Uganda defined it as »the transfer which is made to needy and vulnerable individuals« or »cash which is given directly by the government to deal with a bad situation.« Still others understood it as an approach to poverty eradication, involving, among other things, the promotion of decent work and inclusive employment.<sup>11</sup>

An official in Uganda's Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) observed the apparent lack of conceptual clarity and the seemingly ill-defined boundaries of any SP programmes in the eyes of non-social protection professionals, which leads to the idea being overlooked by some decision-makers. He argued, for example, that MFPED officials did not know whether to classify the cash for vulnerable groups injected into selected communities as SP investments, grants, or benefits.

While conceptual vagueness might be to blame for the failure to distinguish between general anti-poverty and SP programmes, this might also be symptomatic of the failure of the government to explain to citizens what each of the concepts and approaches entails, the links and connections between the two, and how each is being implemented. This gap in understanding has implications, and not

only for what demands citizens can make of existing and future SP programmes. At the very outset, therefore, lack of conceptual clarity presents an important challenge. Discussing the topic in the presence of such a variety of understandings risks yielding inconsistent and incomparable analyses and conclusions and may lead to disparate results when it comes to forming strategies. Even where definitions seem to be closely aligned, they are either too broad or too narrowly focused on delivery of cash transfers only. Understanding and simplifying the concept would help to clarify the sense, purpose, and significance of the subject.

**3.2 PRIORITISATION OF PUBLICLY FUNDED SP BY GOVERNMENTS****3.2.1 PRIORITISATION BY GOVERNMENTS**

Prioritisation of publicly funded SP by the government is not a straight-forward matter. In part this is due to the multi-interest and multi-centre decision-making hubs that exist in government itself. For Uganda, these centres exist in parliament; (b) the ministry responsible for SP; (c) the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) which is responsible for budgeting; (d) the National Planning Authority; and (e) the presidency.

In all the countries that are part of the study, the ministries responsible for social development (and hence SP) have a broadly similar mandate – »mobilising and empowering communities to harness their potential, while protecting the rights of vulnerable population groups.«<sup>12</sup> To achieve this, these institutions perform a wide range of roles, including promoting labour productivity and employment; overseeing implementation of SP; ensuring gender equality; addressing issues of equity; promoting human rights; and supporting culture and empowerment. The goal is to achieve a better standard of living, equity and social cohesion. Some respondents described the ministries in the social development sector as weak and lacking clout. In part this was attributed to the fact that the marginalised groups the ministries are responsible for have neither political capital nor

<sup>11</sup> This latter view was promoted more by employee representatives in parliament.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with James Ebitu, Director of Social Protection, MGLSD (Uganda), and Marion Ouma (academic/independent consultant).

effective representation to challenge their exclusion. Yet, in the view of the ministries themselves, SP has become a higher priority for governments.

Meanwhile, Uganda's Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) described their mandate as formulating economic and fiscal policies, mobilising resources for the implementation of government programmes, and disbursing public resources as guided by parliament<sup>13</sup>. They claimed that since the appropriation of budgets is the preserve of parliament, they (finance officials) should not be blamed for any incongruencies that may occur in budget allocation. Yet, in the same breath, MFPED indicated that SP was still one of the »unfunded priorities«.<sup>14</sup> Many still refer to MFPED as the »gatekeepers« to public financial resources and it is widely known that their view of SP is lukewarm. Therefore, despite the incremental progress which has been made, SP remains a relatively low priority in the national budget.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, MFPED blames a lack of funds, limited capacity of MGLSD to push for and manage substantial financial resources, and the absence of solid evidence to show that current SP investments are making a difference.<sup>16</sup> However, the story is different for Zambia, and to some extent also Kenya. In these two countries, several years of implementation of SP programmes, long-term commitment to financing by donors and political pressure emanating from citizens have been drivers of decision-making on resource allocation to SP. Consequently, SP is on the party-political agenda during and between election periods, featuring in debates and binding commitments. By means of the constitution, Kenya has further entrenched the appropriation of financial resources in the parliament, thereby reducing the powers which finance officials previously had.

Technically, the office of the president in all the countries being studied is the institution through which the president provides leadership in national public policy management. Whether in Zambia, Kenya or Uganda, this office, in practice, wields a lot more power and influence than may even be constitutionally mandated. In Uganda, the current occupant, President Yoweri Museveni, has been head of

state for 36 years, not only maintaining a grip on political power but also employing patronage to sustain a certain level of support. Recently, for example, while presiding over celebrations for the International Day of Older Persons, Museveni acknowledged that the Senior Citizens' Grant currently being implemented by government was a positive investment which could have an annual poverty reduction rate of 1.75 per cent, implying that over a ten-year period, poverty reduction of over ten per cent could be achieved. He also observed that if all targeted groups were covered, increased SP spending could enhance Uganda's GDP growth rate by an additional 1.37 per cent in the period 2020-2031.<sup>17</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered two important issues on the prioritisation of SP. First, there is a high level of vulnerability, demonstrated by the very large number of people (especially in the informal sector) who were in the non-poor category before the pandemic but who slipped into poverty on account of having missed work for just a few days. Second, having given minimal attention to investment in SP over the years, most governments lacked the right systems and structures to adequately respond to the crisis. However, it is not wise to use current political and social sector trends to project too far into the future, as past performance and experience are unlikely to guarantee future outcomes.

### 3.2.2 PRIORITISATION BY CITIZENS

This study did not involve direct contact with citizens; hence it is not possible to comment authoritatively on whether or not they see SP as a priority. However, most of our respondents, especially parliamentarians and those from the CSO sector, had a wealth of knowledge and experience on this matter. Overall, many potential SP beneficiaries still lack information about existing SP programmes, and it is not uncommon in situations where certain programmes have been established for local politicians to claim that they introduced the programme, which sometimes results in a perception among citizens that such programmes are favours or gifts, not entitlements. Thus, the extent to which people view SP programmes as part of the state's responsibility towards them is unclear. This is in part attributable to how poverty, vulnerability and SP are conceptualised. Poor people tend to be highly vulnerable and vulnerable people are highly susceptible to being caught in the poverty trap. This lack of clarity is further exacerbated by the inextricable link between poverty eradication and risk/vulnerability management. However, judging from the enthusiasm and support those citizens show for different SP programmes, it can be concluded that these pro-

<sup>13</sup> Because of this mandate, MFPED provides guidance and leadership for annual and medium-term expenditure and for the preparation of the Annual National Budget and medium-term expenditure allocations. It also formulates, reviews and appraises projects and programmes in cooperation with line ministries and institutions. Importantly, it also coordinates the release of funds for both recurrent and development activities in central and local governments. Some respondents even referred to MFPED as the »super ministry«.

<sup>14</sup> Study respondents informed us that the term is a euphemism for »we are not willing to fund this yet« but at the same time acknowledging that considerable pressure may have already been applied for significant budget allocations to be made.

<sup>15</sup> As indicated earlier, low budget prioritisation by finance officials was not perceived by others as implying that SP itself is a low priority.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout this study, a significant amount of evidence was gathered which contradicts some of these positions. Further, CSO activists pointed out that when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the same MFPED quickly found »supplementary resources« not only for »social-protection-like« interventions but also for less worthy causes, suggesting bad faith on the part of MFPED.

<sup>17</sup> This statement from the president seemed to contradict the indications from MFPED, and it is expected that, capacity and creativity permitting, this will be used as »currency« to move the SP budget allocation agenda forward a few steps. Some in the sector argue, however, that MGLSD has a »capacity problem« and is currently unable to take advantage of such opportunities, even when they arise.

grammes rank very highly among citizens' concerns. Nevertheless, it can still be argued that the public has limited knowledge of the link between SP and their rights, implying that they are likely to be unaware of the government's role and responsibility regarding support for the poor and vulnerable. Accordingly, they would not be able to exercise their rights to SP.

### 3.3 PREDICTABILITY OF FUNDING FOR LIC GOVERNMENTS

When it comes to the financing of SP in the event of the establishment of the GFSP, LICs seriously worry about the unpredictability of funding. Officials from finance ministries, in particular, are apprehensive about making any financial commitments which would simply add an additional burden to already overstretched budgets. For budgets to be predictable, some argue that resources would have to be assured for a period of at least two or three election cycles (10-15 years).<sup>18</sup> Yet, besides declining levels of official development assistance (ODA), the debt burden is also placing a strain on countries such as Zambia and Uganda, a situation that is likely to be exacerbated by the cost of dealing with weather-related catastrophes due to climate change. However, officials also question the effectiveness of overdependency on external funding as this kills initiative and may even create dependency. In any case external financing was considered to be less predictable than domestic financing. In view of this, if and when a Global Fund is established, it should contribute directly to domestic revenue mobilisation and to leveraging the experience gained from different countries and institutions.

### 3.4 POLITICS AS A KEY FACTOR

Trends in SP uptake and development in LICs are to a large extent underpinned by distributive politics and practices. In Zambia, partly evidenced by the 2016 and 2021 elections, SP has been recognised as making a useful contribution to the chances of election or re-election of political leaders. Similarly, in Uganda, citizens from districts which were not yet benefitting from the Older Persons' Cash Transfer Programme pressured their current and prospective members of parliament during the 2016 and 2021 elections to prioritise the inclusion of their districts in the programme or else they (the politicians) would lose their votes. It is evident here that what began as a relatively small programme of cash transfers for older people has now grown into an entitlement-style programme. For several election cycles older people were reported as supporting the ruling party and this was being cultivated to maximise the reciprocity of prospects – votes for benefits. The electoral connection between older people and political representatives (parliamentarians and other elected

officials) thus played a key part in the prioritisation of SP and in the progress, small though it may be, observed in the growing budget allocations to the sector. Similarly, parliament also played a critical role. In Uganda, for example, members of parliament belonging to the Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection (PFSP) understand equality among all vulnerable Ugandans to mean that they are equally entitled to a share of welfare. The positive role of parliament observed suggests that this institution, if supported, could be a springboard for shaping the future direction of SP. The institution would also be well placed to occupy the space previously occupied by donors serving to advance the SP agenda. By playing a bigger role in the debate on the prioritisation of SP, they would convey the impression of supporting a national policy process.

### 3.5 CONCERNS ABOUT CONDITIONALITY

Respondents across the board expressed displeasure (but also concern) about the idea of any form of conditionality being tied to SP financing. One group of respondents<sup>19</sup> observed that donors setting SP policy goals in exchange for access to new funding for LICs posed a two-fold risk. First, there the risk of imposing policy and operational positions and arrangements which may be acceptable to the aid donors but not necessarily for LICs. Alternatively, conditionality might negate preferred or innovative options which the LIC country may want to try. One example given here is the possible exclusion of traditional forms of SP. Second, conditionality which might be based on the adoption of wider economic, for example market-oriented, policies risks creating more poverty and vulnerability. In this case, the SP programmes implemented using foreign aid would simply have a »massaging« effect. In countries such as Uganda, Zambia and Rwanda, where poverty rates are still quite high, unfettered liberalisation could ruin domestic production leading to extensive unemployment.

It was also feared that the loss of autonomy and ownership by partnership stakeholders along with possible domination by countries and institutions in a better financial position could be a possible outcome of conditionality. Low-income countries will most likely lack effective ownership of the GFSP programme once it is established, partly because most financial resources will be invested by Western countries who will inevitably push an agenda driven by their interests, but also due to LICs' capacity challenges.

Some of the government officials in our study mentioned that the World Bank has the advantage of having access to substantial financial and technical resources which can support SP programming of the scale and magnitude that GFSP may be dealing with. This makes it ideal for countries that may be looking for a single source of financing and possible technical assistance to accompany it. The same

<sup>18</sup> The rationale here is that such a period would not allow for new funding options to not only be explored but also tested and evaluated.

<sup>19</sup> Most of these respondents were happy to contribute to the discussion on the condition of anonymity.

officials, however, feared that the Bank might have more stringent conditions and its preferred SP approaches might not fully resonate with LICs. Also, the loans which the Bank provides, though concessional, are subject to a lengthy discussion process and can be excessively intrusive, which could compromise the economic and political sovereignty of the recipient countries.

### 3.6 OTHER OBJECTIONS AND POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

The discussion on conditionality revealed several other deep-seated issues. For example, while expounding on the issue of a possible loss of autonomy, some respondents feared that the challenge of complex shared decision-making processes, like those of the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, might mean that consensus needs to be built with all potential partners before implementation begins. The issue of wider accountability, including to potential beneficiaries, needed to be factored into the discussions.

**Fear of the impact of paternalism:** This is the other potential bottleneck which some respondents expect from countries that will be contributing significant financial resources to support the fund. The problem of paternalism would be aggravated if LICs fail to provide strategic and operational leadership, thus ceding the key responsibilities to the main donor countries by default.

**Programme design may be too north centric:** The frameworks according to which previous global funds, such as the ones on HIV/AIDS and education, have been operating were designed mostly by countries from the more developed world, with perspectives centred on their interests, and without much consultation with countries from the South. While these frameworks were later accepted by the countries in the South, mostly due to the urgency of responding to existing crises, the approach still left a bitter taste in the mouths of those countries. However, the concern expressed by Ugandan parliamentarians and technical staff working on SP was that sometimes that governments in the Global South tended to unduly influence the visions, goals and strategies of those in the South, often arguing that any agreed frameworks would only work well if visions and missions were aligned. Unfortunately, it was also observed, even in instances where African governments disliked the decisions that had been made in other global funds, they were reluctant to express these feelings as the relevant technical personnel feared that by doing so, they could lose the funding provided.

### 3.7 ARE GOVERNMENTS INTERESTED IN TECHNICAL COOPERATION?

Due to the growing sophistication of SP programmes, LIC governments have, in the last few years, become increasingly interested in enhancing technical capacity for designing, implementing, and reviewing SP. The purpose of such

technical assistance is to enhance institutional capacity, strengthen implementation and ensure that SP provision is more efficient, sustainable, and accountable. Officials in the ministries responsible for SP also emphasised the need for technical support to develop policies and strategies, undertake evidence gathering and data analysis, and to undertake programme documentation and dissemination. However, the areas in which technical assistance was believed to be most needed were in the establishment and development of management information systems (MIS) and social registries. Capacity is also needed for developing longer-term and more predictable domestic funding and sharing of information and knowledge from further afield.

However, the need for technical assistance does not stop with governments. Non-governmental organisations and other civil society players also highlighted the need for improved capacity to undertake awareness raising, communication and advocacy. Ugandan officials also cautioned that for technical assistance to be effective it needs to be largely demand-driven. This implies that the fund would have to work strategically with different stakeholders and would have to be mindful of each participating country's right to focus on those issues and benefits which they considered to be most important.

That said, there is unanimity across all categories of respondents that bringing together governments from the Global North and the Global South with non-governmental entities, including public, private, and civil society organisations, would lead to a combination of ideas, values, priorities and resources (beyond financial). This would, in turn, result in the achievement of the desired SP and poverty eradication goals, only possible through strategic collaboration. Respondents from Zambia highlighted that in addition to the increased knowledge sharing facilitated by the partnership, strategic collaboration would make it possible for countries to draw on a wider pool of technical skills, expertise, experience, and networks. If designed well, such collaboration also has the potential to increase efficiencies through the sharing of costs, innovation, and human resources.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.8 INFORMALITY, EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION UPTAKE

For all the countries in our study the relationship between employment status and SP provision is complex. For example, most informal workers, who make up a large share of the employed, lack access to labour protection and SP. However, informality (of employment) also extends to the formal sector and is especially prevalent in registered but unregulated businesses. Other informal sector workers are to be

<sup>20</sup> A respondent from Zambia noted that »good design« meant, among other things, the avoidance of duplication and »layering« of new administrative and operational requirements which could result in the overstretching of officials and implementors.

found in unregistered businesses and within households. While government officials and CSO activists believe that the next frontier for expanding SP coverage in LICs is the informal sector, it is highly unlikely that employers will contribute to this effort, as most businesses of this type are themselves on the margins of survival. The precarious economic situation that most people were already in has been made worse by the impact of COVID-19, which has dealt a heavy blow to unprotected workers in the sector. Regrettably, these negative trends are having disproportionate impacts on categories of people who are already marginalised, including women and people with disabilities. This area should therefore receive renewed attention, and efforts should be made to better understand the incentives which would be needed to spur informal sector employers to provide more support for their workers. A former member of parliament in Uganda suggested that fluctuating incomes, high start-up costs and the absence of advisory services are some of the obstacles which, if the global fund is established, it could help address.

### 3.9 PRIORITISING CHILDREN AND OLDER PERSONS

Children make up about half of the total population of East and Central Africa. In this region, we observe an inextricable link between human capital losses and poverty, exacerbated by the prevalence of AIDS. However, due to their age and dependency, children experience more vulnerability than adults. All the countries in this study have, over the years, been devastated by wars, conflicts, and severe impacts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, leading to an increased number of orphans. For Kenya, a Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) programme, launched in 2004, sought to address the resulting child poverty which seemed to be on the rise.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in Zambia, concerted efforts were made to prevent and reduce poverty for children and families by introducing child-sensitive SP, aimed at addressing chronic poverty, social exclusion and other shocks. This UNICEF-supported Social Cash Transfer Scheme (SCT) initially sought to increase the budget allocation to the SCT programme, having observed that supporting children was politically less controversial than providing support to other categories of the population. The Child Grant Programme – an unconditional cash transfer targeted at rural families with children under the age of five – was reported to have had a positive impact on nutrition and health. Unsurprisingly, a significant number of respondents believed that prioritising children would be the right initial step for the GFSP.

However, an equally significant number of respondents believed that the extent of vulnerability faced by older people suggested that they too should be prioritised as initial targets in the event that the GFSP is established. Many re-

spondents saw the elderly as facing the challenge of old age frailty, disability and health concerns combined with financial uncertainties. In Uganda, the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG), which offers 25,000 Ugandan shillings (7 US dollars) per month to those aged 80 years and above (previously 65 years) reaches more than 150,000 recipients, and besides the positive impacts that it has, it is also politically very popular. Given how closely old age and disability are intertwined, and the ongoing advocacy for people with disabilities to be more fully included in the country's SP programme, it is not unlikely that old-age SP support would be a strong competitor for prioritisation in a future GFSP.

### 3.10 RIGHTS-BASED SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR LICs?

Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognise social security as a right of every member of society. Few people would disagree with this principle. The challenge for most governments is to find the right balance between, on the one hand, recognising SP as a right and, on the other, being able to find the resources, systems, and arrangements to finance and manage the sector. Proponents of the rights approach argue that accessibility, adaptability, acceptability, and adequacy are all needed for SP to function efficiently, effectively, and equitably, while at the same time recognising that LICs are taking the right steps to achieve progress as they build stable foundations for a future GFSP.

It is evident, therefore, that cooperation is needed between policymakers, government officials (who implement the programmes) and SP activists. This cooperation should seek to harmonise positions on what is desirable and what is achievable with the aim of ensuring that those who are entitled to SP are not excluded on account of administrative limitations, such as failure to provide identification documents for registration. The GFSP would be an ideal vehicle to facilitate this kind of discussion.

### 3.11 TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ISSUES

Recommendation No. 202 of the International Labour Organisation refers to »transparent, accountable and sound financial management and administration« (para. 3(j)), stipulating that when formulating and implementing national social security strategies, states should raise awareness about the strategies and put in place information programmes (para 14. (f)) and that national social security strategies should be formulated and implemented based on national consultations through effective social dialogue and participation (para. 13).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, using the 2004 World Development Report accountability framework, Bassett, et al.

<sup>21</sup> Our respondents reported that the Government of Kenya was in the advanced stages of establishing a universal child grant.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::>

(2012) proposed an operational definition of governance (incorporating transparency and accountability) that can also be applied to SP.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in a discussion note published by Development Pathways, Ayliffe, et al. (2018) described social accountability as an approach to building accountability in which citizens are key actors.<sup>24</sup> Drawing on these and other sources to identify points of reference, this study learned that the SP transparency and accountability landscape for most African countries was somewhat vague. In Uganda, for example, no mechanisms exist for citizens to hold government accountable for the use of public funds using SAGE or other similar programmes. An absence of structures and limited capacity among would-be facilitators of transparency and accountability processes were cited as some of the reasons for this failure. However, there were other reasons too. For example, since the expansion of SP in Uganda was closely linked to the election cycle, and the ruling party actively resisted any efforts by CSOs, in particular, to show any government actions in a bad light, the space to raise questions regarding transparency and accountability was seriously diminished, and organisations that attempted to raise rights issues had their operations curtailed. In this situation it became extremely difficult for any beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of SP programmes to engage effectively in social accountability practices—such as participatory budgeting, independent budget analysis, participatory monitoring of public expenditures and citizen evaluation of public services. Similar sentiments were expressed regarding Kenya and Zambia.

The problem of accountable government, therefore, remains, with the political leadership of several countries undermining even the most modest existing accountability structures, and technocrats failing to create the requisite systems, structures, and capacities.

### 3.12 WILLINGNESS TO LEAD LIC ENGAGEMENT

Our study reveals multiple perspectives on the issue of willingness to lead and to make a case for the fund. On the question of »willingness« most respondents observed that their countries were both willing and ready to provide the required leadership.<sup>25</sup> However, an official from Zambia cautioned that in order to answer this question, two conditions had to be fulfilled first: the establishment of a set of clear goals and outcomes for the group; and the agreement of criteria for selecting the country to facilitate conversations among the states interested in participating.<sup>26</sup>

From a political standpoint, it would be beneficial to select at least one country from each of the major language groups, especially from the French and English-speaking blocks. Zambia and Kenya seem to be at the front of the queue for English-speaking countries, while Rwanda might be a good choice for representing French-speaking Africa.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Bassett, L., Giannozzi, S., Pop, L. and Ringold, D. (2012): Rules, Roles and Controls: Governance in Social Protection with an Application to Social Assistance. Discussion Paper No. 1206. Background Paper for the World Bank 2012–2022 Social Protection and Labor Strategy. The World Bank, Washington, USA.

<sup>24</sup> Ayliffe, T., Schjødt, R. and Aslam, G. (2018): Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection. Technical Guidance Note. Development Pathways Limited, Orpington, United Kingdom.

<sup>25</sup> In Kenya and Zambia, however, respondents who preferred to remain anonymous pointed out that the final view and/or decision on this could only come from »higher circles.«

<sup>26</sup> The official argued that such a country would have to be a good listening partner and have a good track record of facilitating shared learning in SP. The country would also need to have the capacity to provide clear direction and vision, encourage exchange, analysis and learning, and to establish constructive, productive and effective working relationships with all participating countries.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note the comment made earlier about Kenya being the possible donor preference here. Moreover, this study was unable to reach out to any respondents in Rwanda and thus cannot gauge the interest, willingness or readiness of the country to lead.



# 4

## CONCLUDING NOTE

The picture that emerges from this study is one of cautious optimism for the future of SP in LICs, and specifically for the anticipated global fund. There is enthusiasm that SP, a key item on the sustainable development agenda, is not only beginning to be incorporated in the mainstream development agenda but is also in the process of finding a potential facilitator and driver with an independent and focused remit. The establishment of the fund would demonstrate recognition that the scale and complexity of poverty, risk and vulnerability cannot be left to old-style poverty eradication approaches adopted by individual countries. A challenge of such magnitude cannot be successfully addressed by single actors, as this requires a variety of tools, models, and experiences. Thus, the representation and participation of LICs in moving forward with this agenda is extremely crucial.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>APSP</b>	Africa Platform for Social Protection
<b>ASAL</b>	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
<b>BWC</b>	Beneficiary Welfare Committee
<b>CBT</b>	community-based targeting
<b>CSPS</b>	Civil Service Pension Scheme
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CFA</b>	Cash for Assets
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organisations
<b>CT-OVC</b>	Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community
<b>ESP</b>	Expanding Social Protection Programme
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FBO</b>	faith-based organisations
<b>FSD</b>	Financial Sector Deepening
<b>GCSPF</b>	Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GFSP</b>	Global Fund for Social Protection
<b>GoK</b>	Government of Kenya
<b>HSNP</b>	Hunger Safety Net Programme
<b>ICT</b>	Information, Communication and Technology
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IRA</b>	Insurance Regulatory Authority
<b>IPRS</b>	Integrated Population Registration Service
<b>ISA MIS</b>	Integrated Social Assistance Management Information System
<b>LICs</b>	Low-Income Countries
<b>MEACLSP</b>	Ministry of East African Community, Labour and Social Protection
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MIS</b>	Management Information System
<b>MFPED</b>	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
<b>MGLSD</b>	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
<b>MoDP</b>	Ministry of Devolution and Planning
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MTEF</b>	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
<b>NDMA</b>	National Drought Management Authority
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>NRM</b>	National Resistance Movement
<b>NSSF</b>	National Social Security Fund
<b>NUSAF</b>	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OPCT</b>	Older Persons' Cash Transfer
<b>PFSP</b>	Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection (Uganda)
<b>PPF</b>	Parastatal Pension Fund
<b>PSNP</b>	Productive Safety Net Programme (Ethiopia)
<b>PSSP</b>	Public Service Pension Fund
<b>PSRBS</b>	Public Service Retirement Benefits Scheme
<b>SAGE</b>	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment
<b>SCT</b>	Social Cash Transfer Program
<b>SP</b>	social protection
<b>SPF</b>	social protection floor
<b>ToR</b>	terms of reference
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNSPF</b>	United Nations Social Protection Floor
<b>VUP</b>	Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (Rwanda)

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**Charles Lwanga-Ntale** is an independent consultant who, for over 20 years, has worked on poverty, vulnerability, and social protection issues, mostly in Eastern Africa. He previously led the chronic poverty research agenda in Uganda and was also closely involved in the design stage of the Uganda Social Protection Programme, currently implemented as Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE). He previously worked as Head of Social Protection for Africa in HelpAge, Regional Director for Africa for Development Initiatives, and Director for East Africa for the Humanitarian Leadership Academy. More lately he led research assignments for a DFID study on vulnerability and resilience in Somalia and for FAO on Social Protection for Forest-dependent communities in Tanzania.

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# A GLOBAL FUND FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

## Views from Selected Low-income Countries



Low Income Countries' (LICs) views of the proposed Global Fund for Social Protection (GFSP) reveal an image of cautious optimism for the future of social protection - enthusiasm that social protection is on the cusp of being incorporated in the mainstream development agenda, but concern too that marshalling the required financial resources and securing the needed political buy-in could still stand in the way of progress.



Conceptual vagueness and policy incoherence present major challenges and may be symptomatic of the failure of duty-bearers to have in place an empirical framework which categorises the key elements, features, and experiences that are implied in the social protection concept. Social protection should be described in such a way that everyone understands it uniformly. Likewise, fragmented, uncoordinated anti-poverty policy, and disjointed approaches to dealing with vulnerability ought to be avoided.



The priority which LICs attach to social protection, and to establishment of a global facility to inspire and drive progress may be significant, but there are concerns about how a possible GFSP would work, especially in the absence of guarantees for future financing. A mechanism for effective LICs' inclusion, participation, and for drawing on their experiences would help to build a shared future path for the fund with the LICs at the discussion table.

Further information on the topic can be found here:  
<https://geneva.fes.de/topics/employment-and-social-policy>